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Delusional Thinking in the Senate

Editorial

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Almost six months to the day after President Bush urged Congress in his State of the Union address to help break America's addiction to imported oil, the Senate approved a bill yesterday that would do nothing to cure that addiction and could actually make it worse.

The bill, which would open up 8.3 million acres in the Gulf of Mexico for new energy development, is bad fiscal policy, since one-third of the royalties that would normally accrue to all Americans from drilling in federal waters would flow to just four gulf states. Even as a drilling bill it makes little sense; to placate Florida's senators, it prohibits drilling in offshore areas that are richer in resources than the areas it opens up. And as energy policy it's hopelessly one-sided, encouraging production while ignoring consumption.

After Mr. Bush's address in January, the Senate legislative machinery went into overdrive and produced scores of energy-

related bills, at least two of which were comprehensive, bipartisan measures aimed at reducing oil consumption by half over the next quarter-century by encouraging energy efficiency and alternative fuels. But Bill Frist, the Senate majority leader, prohibited any changes to this bill, pretty much shutting the door on any grown-up discussion of the country's energy future.

Mary Landrieu, a Democrat whose home state of Louisiana would benefit handsomely, conceded that by ignoring demand the bill represented only "half the solution" to the country's energy problems. Even that is a big exaggeration. The gulf might well yield enough natural gas to make a difference in price. But there is not enough oil there or anywhere else in the United States to make a difference in the price of a barrel of oil or a gallon of gasoline at the pump. Why the Senate persists in deluding itself on this remains one of the mysteries of the age.